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A Dissertation

Passed March 10th 1827
W. R. H.

on

Dysmenorrhœa

By

John R Herndon

N. Carolina

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Dysmenorrhœa

No diseases have a greater claim upon the exercise of medical talents than those which afflict the female sex. If woman be "the last & best gift to man" certainly she has a claim upon our sympathies our aid & protection. Yet strange as it may seem medical record will justify the assertion that the Dysmenorrhœa which is one of her most common complaints has not till very lately received that attention which its severity demands. The disease is certainly very common in this country and I know of no other in the lengthened catalogue of human miseries which is more intensely severe. The most common causes of this complaint are cold frequent abortions and the too frequent gratification of lacivious propensities. Cold is by

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far the most fruitful source of this disease. But its injurious effects are always most certain if applied during the menstrual flow. I presume that cold operates by giving a check to the healthy functions of the uterus when its performance is most important. Abortions, by defeating the regular order of nature, and the excessive indulgence of the venereal appetite by disturbing that repose into which the genital organs are wont to settle after the fatigue of an exquisitely delicious excitement. The distinguished author of that inimitable system of Midwifery which has been received with so much applause by the American Republic as a basis upon which to rear the superstructure of our national pride and literary glory remarks "that he has sometimes known this disease to follow the consummation of marriage" which "cause" he adds "is perhaps the most

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difficult of explanation. With respectful deference I would fain suppose if it be not presumption to entertain an opinion of my own that the cases which followed the consummation of the matrimonial vow took place in persons farther advanced in life than the ordinary period for such an event. And that the genital system had settled down into habits of maiden celibacy never more to be disturbed by the recurrence of venereal incalescence without the hazard of functional derangement and never more to afford gratification to another without evidencing that petulent dissatisfaction which results in disorder. The last remarks are altogether inferential drawn from the disposition of old maids in general. It is not necessary here to speak of the intimate connection which exists between the body and the mind and the influence of the one over the operations of the other.

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This disease follows its cause with as much uniformity in the single as the married state, and during any part of the menstruating period from 14 to 45 years of age imprudence or accident may subject a woman to its excruciating tortures.
I am acquainted with two families every female member of which is labouring under this disease, yet I pretend not to say it depends upon peculiar conformation, but to imprudence & waywardness of disposition.

This disease generally commences with slight discharges of a menstruous fluid, but is very speedily arrested. After a very short interval pains very much resembling labour pains commence and alternately at indefinite intervals continue from two or three hours to two or three days. These pains generally described as being "pouring" and bearing down are excited to extrude a membranous product accumulated in the Uterus. This membrane or coagulum is said to be of

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unequal size very much resembling the uterus in shape. It is sometimes expelled in broken masses and sometimes in large or small quantities. The quantity of matter very materially influences the pain occasioning less when ~~much often~~ much is discharged. Besides those labour-like pains there is generally a permanent one the back hips and loins. These generally commence before the alternate ones and announce them near at hand.

There are two forms of this disease. The one is accompanied with a tumefied and pained breast, the other has no such symptoms. The first form is the more manageable of the two. This disease sometimes though rarely terminates in inflammation accompanied with a foul tongue and tense and corded pulse together with a pain in the pubic region.

There are two indications in the cure of this disease. The first is to alleviate the urgency of

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the symptoms during a recurrence of the attack and the second to employ those means during an interval which will prevent its return. To answer the first indication we are informed by the author above alluded to that nothing has succeeded so well in his hands as the Gum Camphor in the form of a Julep. The following is the prescription which employs.

℞. . . .

Gum. Camphor . . . ℈ i
Spirit. vin. recti. q. s. ft pulv.
Pulv. Gum Arabic ℥ j
Sach. album . . . q. s.
Aqua Simp. cin. . . ℥ j
M.

Half of this mixture must be given as soon as the pains are perceived. And if in the course of one or two hours no relief is obtained the balance must be taken. This mixture may be repeated pro re nata. But Doctor Chapman

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thinks this mixture may be improved by the addition of 25 or 30 drops of laudanum, and this I know to be the fact for I have tried it. But it occasionally happens that the stomach is in such an irritable condition that nothing will remain on it. In this case it becomes necessary to prescribe an injection composed of ingredients similar to the above viz—

℞. ...

Gum Camphor — XXX grs.
Alkohol — q. s. f. pulv.
Laudanum — ℥j
Flaxseed tea — ℥jV

M.

This composition may be repeated according to circumstances. Where inflammation ensues the remedies generally employed in that class of diseases may be had recource to according to the nature of the case.

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attempt a radical cure during an interval. For this purpose no remedy enjoys a greater reputation than the Volatile tincture of Guaiacum in doses of a teaspoonful morning noon and night to be taken in a wine glassful of sweetened milk or madeira wine if there be not too much action in the system. But where it becomes necessary to persevere in the use of this medicine for more than four or five weeks the dose must be gradually increased. It must not be forgotten that the system must always be prepared for the reception of this article by previous bloodletting purging and the antiphlogistic regimen if it be not already at that point which will favour its remedial operation. Should this medicine unduly increase the peristaltic motion of the intestines a few drops of laudanum must be combined with each dose. If on the contrary it should constipate some mild cathartic may counteract its effects.

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Should the tincture of Guaiac fail to cure this disease, for I never heard of its being a specific the extract of Cicuta or tincture of Cantharides may be substituted. In conclusion I hope that an absolute & unavoidable want of opportunity to digest this subject will <u>secure</u> an indulgent criticism.

Dec: 10th 1826.

John R. Monroe
N.C.